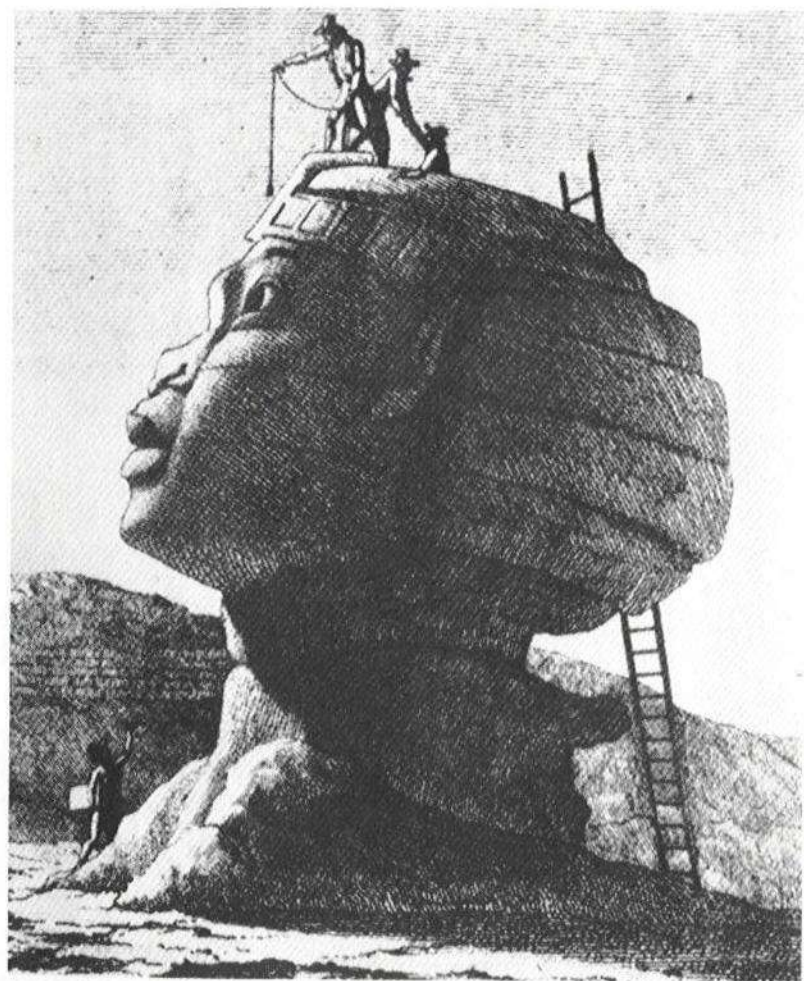


THE AFRICAN ORIGIN
OF CIVILIZATION
Myth or Reality



1. The Sphinx, as the first French scientific mission found it in the nineteenth century. This profile is neither Greek nor Semitic: it is Bantu. Its model is said to have been Pharaoh Chephren (circa 2600 B.C., Fourth Dynasty), who built the second Giza pyramid.

Cheikh Anta Diop

*THE
AFRICAN
ORIGIN
OF
CIVILIZATION*

Myth or Reality

Translated from the French by

MERCER COOK

LAWRENCE HILL & COMPANY

New York • Westport

This book consists of selections from
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Présence Africaine, Paris, 1955.
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Dr. Diop's method is multi-faceted and reflects his varied background as "historian, physicist, and philosopher." Obenga singles him out as "the only Black African of his generation to have received training as an Egyptologist." As a Senegalese, he has had direct contact with the oral traditions and social structure of West Africa. From André Aymard, Professor of History and later Dean of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Paris, he has gained an understanding of the Greco-Latin world. As a student of Gaston Bachelard, Frédéric Joliot-Curie, André Leroi-Gourhan, and others, he has acquired proficiency in such diverse disciplines as rationalism, dialectics, modern scientific techniques, prehistoric archeology, and so on. More importantly, he has applied this encyclopedic knowledge to his researches on African history.

"While pursuing this research," he told the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in September 1956, "we have come to discover that the ancient Pharaonic Egyptian civilization was undoubtedly a Negro civilization. To defend this thesis, anthropological, ethnological, linguistic, historical, and cultural arguments have been provided. To judge their validity, it suffices to refer to *Nations nègres et culture* . . ."²

Thus he proceeded in *Nations nègres et culture* and subsequent volumes to document conclusions that form a coherent theory, controversial because it refutes many ideas previously presented by Egyptologists, anthropologists, archeologists, linguists, and historians.

1. Théophile Obenga, "Méthode et conception historiques de Cheikh Anta Diop." *Présence Africaine*, number 74, 2nd quarter, 1970, pp. 3-28.

2. *Présence Africaine*, numbers 8-10, June-November, 1956, p. 339.

A good example of this is Chapter XII of the present volume in which he replies to a critical review of *Nations nègres*.

More than a decade ago Immanuel Wallerstein summarized Dr. Diop's contribution as follows:

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to reconstruct African history has been the numerous writings of Cheikh Anta Diop. Diop has a theory that there is a basic global division of peoples into two kinds: the Southerners (or Negro-Africans), and the Aryans (a category covering all Caucasians, including Semites, Mongoloids, and American Indians). Each grouping has a cultural outlook based on response to climate, the difference between them being that the Aryans have had a harsher climate.

The Aryans have developed patriarchal systems characterized by the suppression of women and a propensity for war. Also associated with such societies are materialist religion, sin and guilt, xenophobia, the tragic drama, the city-state, individualism, and pessimism. Southerners, on the other hand, are matriarchal. The women are free and the people peaceful; there is a Dionysian approach to life, religious idealism, and no concept of sin. With a matriarchal society come xenophilia, the tale as a literary form, the territorial state, social collectivism, and optimism.

According to Diop's theory, the ancient Egyptians, who were Negroes, are the ancestors of the Southerners. This bold hypothesis, which is not presented without supporting data, has the interesting effect of inverting Western cultural assumptions. For, Diop argues, if the ancient Egyptians were Negroes, then European civilization is but a derivation of African achievement. . . .³

Born on December 29, 1923, at Diourbel, Senegal, Cheikh Anta Diop received his master of arts degree and his doctorate from the University of Paris. Since 1961 he has been on the staff of IFAN (Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire)⁴ in Dakar, where he directs the radiocarbon laboratory which he founded. In 1966, at the First

3. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa: The Politics of Independence*. New York: Vintage Books, 1961, pp. 129-130. A footnote on p. 130 reads: "The hypothesis is not original with Diop. Other scholars, such as W. E. B. DuBois, had earlier presented the argument that the ancient Egyptians were Negroes."

4. Fundamental Institute of Black Africa. Cf. Cheikh Anta Diop, *Le Laboratoire de radiocarbène de l'IFAN* (Dakar: IFAN, 1968). Diop dedicated this 110-page book "to the memory of my former professor Frédéric Joliot who welcomed me into his laboratory at the Collège de France."

World Festival of Negro Arts, he shared a special award with the late W. E. B. DuBois, as the writer who had exerted the greatest influence on Negro thought in the twentieth century.

All numbered footnotes in the present volume (except for inserted material included between square brackets and so indicated) are the author's and are placed at the end of the book. All asterisked footnotes within the text are the editor-translator's. For the reader's convenience, a list of Brief Biographical Notes on authors and authorities mentioned within the book but not identified exhaustively is given as an appendix. Most archeological terms used in the book are also listed and defined in an appendix.

M.C.

PREFACE

The Meaning of Our Work

I began my research in September 1946; because of our colonial situation at that time, the political problem dominated all others. In 1949 the RDA* was undergoing a crisis. I felt that Africa should mobilize all its energy to help the movement turn the tide of repression: thus I was elected Secretary General of the RDA students in Paris and served from 1950 to 1953. On July 4-8, 1951 we held in Paris the first postwar Pan African political congress of students, with the West African Student Union (from London) well represented by more than 30 delegates, including the daughter of the Oni of Ife, the late Miss Aderemi Tedju. In February 1953 the first issue of the *Voie de l'Afrique Noire* appeared; this was the organ of the RDA students. In it I published an article entitled "Toward a Political Ideology in Black Africa."

That article contained a résumé of *Nations nègres*, the manuscript of which was already completed. All our ideas on African history, the past and future of our languages, their utilization in the most advanced scientific fields as in education generally, our concepts on the creation of a future federal state, continental or subcontinental, our thoughts on African social structures, on strategy and tactics in the struggle for national independence, and so forth, all those ideas were clearly expressed in that article. As would subsequently be seen, with respect to the problem of the continent's political independence, the French-speaking African politicians took their own good time before admitting that this was the right political road to follow. Nevertheless, the RDA students organized themselves into a federation within France and politicized African student circles by popularizing the slogan of national independence for Africa from the Sahara to the Cape

*Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (Democratic African Rally), the RDA, founded in 1946, "was the first interterritorial movement in French West Africa, created before parties in territories other than Senegal or Ivory Coast had taken root." Ruth S. Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-speaking West Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, p. 302.

and from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, as our periodical at-tests. The archives of the FEANF (Federation of African Students in France) indicate that it did not begin to adopt anticolonialist positions until it was directed by RDA students.* We stressed the cultural and political content that we included in the concept of independence in order to get the latter adopted in French-speaking Africa: already forgotten is the bitter struggle that had to be waged to impose it on student circles in Paris, throughout France, and even within the ranks of RDA students.

The cultural concept especially will claim our attention here; the problem was posed in terms of restoring the collective national African personality. It was particularly necessary to avoid the pitfall of facility. It could seem too tempting to delude the masses engaged in a struggle for national independence by taking liberties with scientific truth, by unveiling a mythical, embellished past. Those who have followed us in our efforts for more than 20 years know now that this was not the case and that this fear remained groundless.

Admittedly three factors compete to form the collective personality of a people: a psychic factor, susceptible of a literary approach; this is the factor that would elsewhere be called national temperament, and that the Negritude poets have overstressed. In addition, there are the historical factor and the linguistic factor, both susceptible of being approached scientifically. These last two factors have been the subject of our studies; we have endeavored to remain strictly on scientific grounds. Have foreign intellectuals, who challenge our intentions and accuse us of all kinds of hidden motives or ridiculous ideas, proceeded any differently? When they explain their own historical past or study their languages, that seems normal. Yet, when an African does likewise to help reconstruct the national personality of his people, distorted by colonialism, that is considered backward or alarming. We contend that such a study is the point of departure for the

*Starting especially with the administration of Franklin, secretary general of the RDA students at Montpellier. Cf. the article by Penda Marcelle Ouegnin: "Un compte-rendu du Congrès de la FEANF organisé par les ERDA aux Sociétés savantes le 8 avril 1953," in the same bulletin cited above, May-June 1953.

Similarly, with a few exceptions, the PAI (African Independence Party) was organized by former RDA students who had returned to Africa. Various branches in France rallied to the new party which thus carried forward the RDA line and popularized the slogan of national independence that we had launched.

cultural revolution properly understood. All the headlong flights of certain infantile leftists who try to bypass this effort can be explained by intellectual inertia, inhibition, or incompetence. The most brilliant pseudo-revolutionary eloquence ignores that need which must be met if our peoples are to be reborn culturally and politically. In truth, many Africans find this vision too beautiful to be true; not so long ago some of them could not break with the idea that Blacks are non-existent culturally and historically. It was necessary to put up with the cliché that Africans had no history and try to start from there to build something modestly!

Our investigations have convinced us that the West has not been calm enough and objective enough to teach us our history correctly, without crude falsifications. Today, what interests me most is to see the formation of teams, not of passive readers, but of honest, bold research workers, allergic to complacency and busy substantiating and exploring ideas expressed in our work, such as:

1. Ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt. In particular, the study of languages, institutions, and so forth, cannot be treated properly; in a word, it will be impossible to build African humanities, a body of African human sciences, so long as that relationship does not appear legitimate. The African historian who evades the problem of Egypt is neither modest nor objective, nor unruffled; he is ignorant, cowardly, and neurotic. Imagine, if you can, the uncomfortable position of a western historian who was to write the history of Europe without referring to Greco-Latin Antiquity and try to pass that off as a scientific approach.

The ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, that Black world is the very initiator of the "western" civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science. One needs only to meditate on Osiris, the redeemer-god, who sacrifices himself, dies, and is resurrected to save mankind, a figure essentially identifiable with Christ.

A visitor to Thebes in the Valley of the Kings can view the Moslem inferno in detail (in the tomb of Seti I, of the Nineteenth Dy-

nasty), 1700 years before the Koran. Osiris at the tribunal of the dead is indeed the "lord" of revealed religions, sitting enthroned on Judgment Day, and we know that certain Biblical passages are practically copies of Egyptian moral texts. Far be it from me to confuse this brief reminder with a demonstration. It is simply a matter of providing a few landmarks to persuade the incredulous Black African reader to bring himself to verify this. To his great surprise and satisfaction, he will discover that most of the ideas used today to domesticate, atrophy, dissolve, or steal his "soul," were conceived by his own ancestors. To become conscious of that fact is perhaps the first step toward a genuine retrieval of himself; without it, intellectual sterility is the general rule, or else the creations bear I know not what imprint of the subhuman.

In a word, we must restore the historical consciousness of the African peoples and reconquer a Promethean consciousness.

2. Anthropologically and culturally speaking, the Semitic world was born during protohistoric times from the mixture of white-skinned and black-skinned people in western Asia. This is why an understanding of the Mesopotamian Semitic world, Judaic or Arabic, requires constant reference to the underlying Black reality. If certain Biblical passages, especially in the Old Testament, seem absurd, this is because specialists, puffed up with prejudices, are unable to accept documentary evidence.

3. The triumph of the monogenetic thesis of humanity (Leakey), even at the stage of "Homo sapiens-sapiens," compels one to admit that all races descended from the Black race, according to a filiation process that science will one day explain.*

4. In *L'Afrique Noire précoloniale* (1960), I had two objectives: (1) to demonstrate the possibility of writing a history of Black Africa free of mere chronology of events, as the preface to that volume clearly indicates; (2) to define the laws governing the evolution of African sociopolitical structures, in order to explain the direction that historical evolution has taken in Black Africa; therefore, to try henceforth to dominate and master that historical process by knowledge, rather than simply to submit to it.

These last questions, like those about origins (Egypt), are among

*Cf. Cheikh Anta Diop, "L'Apparition de l'homo-sapiens," *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, XXXII, Series II, number 3, 1970.

—, "La Pigmentation des anciens Egyptiens. Test par la mélanine," *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, 1973 (in press).

the key problems; once they are solved, a scholar can proceed to write the history of Africa. Consequently, it is evident why we are paying particular attention to the solution of such problems and of so many others which transcend the field of history.

The research pattern inaugurated by *L'Afrique Noire précoloniale* on the sociohistorical, not on the ethnographic, plane has since been utilized by many researchers. That, I suppose, is what has led them to describing the daily life of the Congolese or enlarging upon the various forms of political, economic, social, military, and judicial organization in Africa.

5. To define the image of a modern Africa reconciled with its past and preparing for its future.*

6. Once the perspectives accepted until now by official science have been reversed, the history of humanity will become clear and the history of Africa can be written. But any undertaking in this field that adopts compromise as its point of departure as if it were possible to split the difference, or the truth, in half, would run the risk of producing nothing but alienation. Only a loyal, determined struggle to destroy cultural aggression and bring out the truth, whatever it may be, is revolutionary and consonant with real progress; it is the only approach which opens on to the universal. Humanitarian declarations are not called for and add nothing to real progress.

Similarly, it is not a matter of looking for the Negro under a magnifying glass as one scans the past; a great people has nothing to do with petty history, nor with ethnographic reflections sorely in need of renovation. It matters little that some brilliant Black individuals may have existed elsewhere. The essential factor is to retrace the history of the entire nation. The contrary is tantamount to thinking that to be or not to be depends on whether or not one is known in Europe. The effort is corrupted at the base by the presence of the very complex one hopes to eradicate. Why not study the acculturation of the white man in a Black milieu, in ancient Egypt, for example?

7. How does it happen that all modern Black literature has remained minor, in the sense that no Negro African author or artist, to my knowledge, has yet posed the problem of man's fate, the major theme of human letters?

8. In *L'Unité culturelle de l'Afrique Noire*, we tried to pinpoint the features common to Negro African civilization.

*Cf. Cheikh Anta Diop, *Les Fondements culturels et industriels d'un futur Etat fédéral d'Afrique Noire*.

9. In the second part of *Nations nègres*, we demonstrated that African languages could express philosophic and scientific thought (mathematics, physics, and so forth)* and that African culture will not be taken seriously until their utilization in education becomes a reality. The events of the past few years prove that UNESCO has accepted those ideas.†

10. I am delighted to learn that one idea proposed in *L'Afrique Noire précoloniale*—the possibilities of pre-Columbian relations between Africa and America—has been taken up by an American scholar. Professor Harold G. Lawrence, of Oakland University, is in fact demonstrating with an abundance of proof the reality of those relationships which were merely hypothetical in my work. If the sum total of his impressive arguments stands up to the test of chronology, if it can be proved in the final analysis that all the facts noted existed prior to the period of slavery, his research will have surely contributed solid material to the edifice of historical knowledge.

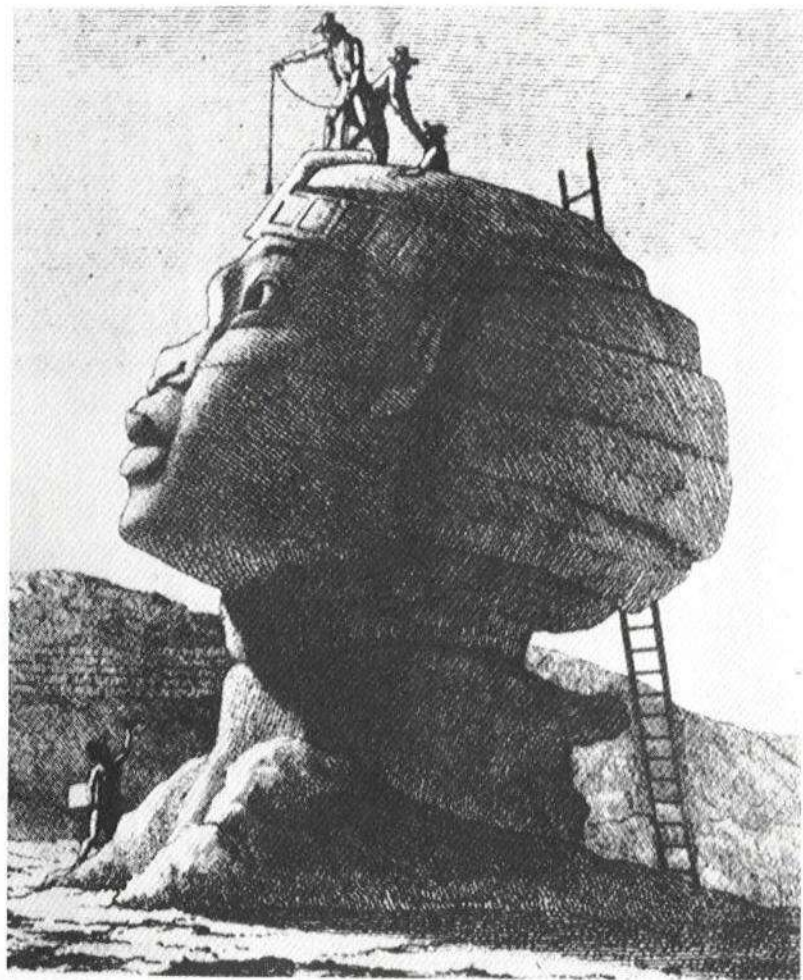
I should like to conclude by urging young American scholars of good will, both Blacks and Whites, to form university teams and to become involved, like Professor Lawrence, in the effort to confirm various ideas that I have advanced, instead of limiting themselves to a negative, sterile skepticism. They would soon be dazzled, it not blinded, by the bright light of their future discoveries. In fact, our conception of African history, as exposed here, has practically triumphed, and those who write on African history now, whether willingly or not, base themselves upon it. But the American contribution to this final phase could be decisive.

Cheikh Anta Diop
July 1973

*In *Nations nègres*, Dr. Diop translates a page of Einstein's Theory of Relativity into Wolof, the principal language of Senegal.

†Bamako 1964 colloquium on the transcription of African languages, various measures taken to promote African languages, and so forth.

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1. Théophile Obenga, "Méthode et conception historiques de Cheikh Anta Diop." *Présence Africaine*, number 74, 2nd quarter, 1970, pp. 3-28.

2. *Présence Africaine*, numbers 8-10, June-November, 1956, p. 339.

A good example of this is Chapter XII of the present volume in which he replies to a critical review of *Nations nègres*.

More than a decade ago Immanuel Wallerstein summarized Dr. Diop's contribution as follows:

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to reconstruct African history has been the numerous writings of Cheikh Anta Diop. Diop has a theory that there is a basic global division of peoples into two kinds: the Southerners (or Negro-Africans), and the Aryans (a category covering all Caucasians, including Semites, Mongoloids, and American Indians). Each grouping has a cultural outlook based on response to climate, the difference between them being that the Aryans have had a harsher climate.

The Aryans have developed patriarchal systems characterized by the suppression of women and a propensity for war. Also associated with such societies are materialist religion, sin and guilt, xenophobia, the tragic drama, the city-state, individualism, and pessimism. Southerners, on the other hand, are matriarchal. The women are free and the people peaceful; there is a Dionysian approach to life, religious idealism, and no concept of sin. With a matriarchal society come xenophilia, the tale as a literary form, the territorial state, social collectivism, and optimism.

According to Diop's theory, the ancient Egyptians, who were Negroes, are the ancestors of the Southerners. This bold hypothesis, which is not presented without supporting data, has the interesting effect of inverting Western cultural assumptions. For, Diop argues, if the ancient Egyptians were Negroes, then European civilization is but a derivation of African achievement. . . .³

Born on December 29, 1923, at Diourbel, Senegal, Cheikh Anta Diop received his master of arts degree and his doctorate from the University of Paris. Since 1961 he has been on the staff of IFAN (Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire)⁴ in Dakar, where he directs the radiocarbon laboratory which he founded. In 1966, at the First

3. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa: The Politics of Independence*. New York: Vintage Books, 1961, pp. 129-130. A footnote on p. 130 reads: "The hypothesis is not original with Diop. Other scholars, such as W. E. B. DuBois, had earlier presented the argument that the ancient Egyptians were Negroes."

4. Fundamental Institute of Black Africa. Cf. Cheikh Anta Diop, *Le Laboratoire de radiocarbone de l'IFAN* (Dakar: IFAN, 1968). Diop dedicated this 110-page book "to the memory of my former professor Frédéric Joliot who welcomed me into his laboratory at the Collège de France."

World Festival of Negro Arts, he shared a special award with the late W. E. B. DuBois, as the writer who had exerted the greatest influence on Negro thought in the twentieth century.

All numbered footnotes in the present volume (except for inserted material included between square brackets and so indicated) are the author's and are placed at the end of the book. All asterisked footnotes within the text are the editor-translator's. For the reader's convenience, a list of Brief Biographical Notes on authors and authorities mentioned within the book but not identified exhaustively is given as an appendix. Most archeological terms used in the book are also listed and defined in an appendix.

M.C.

PREFACE

The Meaning of Our Work

I began my research in September 1946; because of our colonial situation at that time, the political problem dominated all others. In 1949 the RDA* was undergoing a crisis. I felt that Africa should mobilize all its energy to help the movement turn the tide of repression: thus I was elected Secretary General of the RDA students in Paris and served from 1950 to 1953. On July 4-8, 1951 we held in Paris the first postwar Pan African political congress of students, with the West African Student Union (from London) well represented by more than 30 delegates, including the daughter of the Oni of Ife, the late Miss Aderemi Tedju. In February 1953 the first issue of the *Voie de l'Afrique Noire* appeared; this was the organ of the RDA students. In it I published an article entitled "Toward a Political Ideology in Black Africa."

That article contained a résumé of *Nations nègres*, the manuscript of which was already completed. All our ideas on African history, the past and future of our languages, their utilization in the most advanced scientific fields as in education generally, our concepts on the creation of a future federal state, continental or subcontinental, our thoughts on African social structures, on strategy and tactics in the struggle for national independence, and so forth, all those ideas were clearly expressed in that article. As would subsequently be seen, with respect to the problem of the continent's political independence, the French-speaking African politicians took their own good time before admitting that this was the right political road to follow. Nevertheless, the RDA students organized themselves into a federation within France and politicized African student circles by popularizing the slogan of national independence for Africa from the Sahara to the Cape

*Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (Democratic African Rally), the RDA, founded in 1946, "was the first interterritorial movement in French West Africa, created before parties in territories other than Senegal or Ivory Coast had taken root." Ruth S. Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-speaking West Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, p. 302.

and from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, as our periodical at-tests. The archives of the FEANF (Federation of African Students in France) indicate that it did not begin to adopt anticolonialist positions until it was directed by RDA students.* We stressed the cultural and political content that we included in the concept of independence in order to get the latter adopted in French-speaking Africa: already forgotten is the bitter struggle that had to be waged to impose it on student circles in Paris, throughout France, and even within the ranks of RDA students.

The cultural concept especially will claim our attention here; the problem was posed in terms of restoring the collective national African personality. It was particularly necessary to avoid the pitfall of facility. It could seem too tempting to delude the masses engaged in a struggle for national independence by taking liberties with scientific truth, by unveiling a mythical, embellished past. Those who have followed us in our efforts for more than 20 years know now that this was not the case and that this fear remained groundless.

Admittedly three factors compete to form the collective personality of a people: a psychic factor, susceptible of a literary approach; this is the factor that would elsewhere be called national temperament, and that the Negritude poets have overstressed. In addition, there are the historical factor and the linguistic factor, both susceptible of being approached scientifically. These last two factors have been the subject of our studies; we have endeavored to remain strictly on scientific grounds. Have foreign intellectuals, who challenge our intentions and accuse us of all kinds of hidden motives or ridiculous ideas, proceeded any differently? When they explain their own historical past or study their languages, that seems normal. Yet, when an African does likewise to help reconstruct the national personality of his people, distorted by colonialism, that is considered backward or alarming. We contend that such a study is the point of departure for the

*Starting especially with the administration of Franklin, secretary general of the RDA students at Montpellier. Cf. the article by Penda Marcelle Ouegnin: "Un compte-rendu du Congrès de la FEANF organisé par les ERDA aux Sociétés savantes le 8 avril 1953," in the same bulletin cited above, May-June 1953.

Similarly, with a few exceptions, the PAI (African Independence Party) was organized by former RDA students who had returned to Africa. Various branches in France rallied to the new party which thus carried forward the RDA line and popularized the slogan of national independence that we had launched.

cultural revolution properly understood. All the headlong flights of certain infantile leftists who try to bypass this effort can be explained by intellectual inertia, inhibition, or incompetence. The most brilliant pseudo-revolutionary eloquence ignores that need which must be met if our peoples are to be reborn culturally and politically. In truth, many Africans find this vision too beautiful to be true; not so long ago some of them could not break with the idea that Blacks are non-existent culturally and historically. It was necessary to put up with the cliché that Africans had no history and try to start from there to build something modestly!

Our investigations have convinced us that the West has not been calm enough and objective enough to teach us our history correctly, without crude falsifications. Today, what interests me most is to see the formation of teams, not of passive readers, but of honest, bold research workers, allergic to complacency and busy substantiating and exploring ideas expressed in our work, such as:

1. Ancient Egypt was a Negro civilization. The history of Black Africa will remain suspended in air and cannot be written correctly until African historians dare to connect it with the history of Egypt. In particular, the study of languages, institutions, and so forth, cannot be treated properly; in a word, it will be impossible to build African humanities, a body of African human sciences, so long as that relationship does not appear legitimate. The African historian who evades the problem of Egypt is neither modest nor objective, nor unruffled; he is ignorant, cowardly, and neurotic. Imagine, if you can, the uncomfortable position of a western historian who was to write the history of Europe without referring to Greco-Latin Antiquity and try to pass that off as a scientific approach.

The ancient Egyptians were Negroes. The moral fruit of their civilization is to be counted among the assets of the Black world. Instead of presenting itself to history as an insolvent debtor, that Black world is the very initiator of the "western" civilization flaunted before our eyes today. Pythagorean mathematics, the theory of the four elements of Thales of Miletus, Epicurean materialism, Platonic idealism, Judaism, Islam, and modern science are rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science. One needs only to meditate on Osiris, the redeemer-god, who sacrifices himself, dies, and is resurrected to save mankind, a figure essentially identifiable with Christ.

A visitor to Thebes in the Valley of the Kings can view the Moslem inferno in detail (in the tomb of Seti I, of the Nineteenth Dy-

nasty), 1700 years before the Koran. Osiris at the tribunal of the dead is indeed the "lord" of revealed religions, sitting enthroned on Judgment Day, and we know that certain Biblical passages are practically copies of Egyptian moral texts. Far be it from me to confuse this brief reminder with a demonstration. It is simply a matter of providing a few landmarks to persuade the incredulous Black African reader to bring himself to verify this. To his great surprise and satisfaction, he will discover that most of the ideas used today to domesticate, atrophy, dissolve, or steal his "soul," were conceived by his own ancestors. To become conscious of that fact is perhaps the first step toward a genuine retrieval of himself; without it, intellectual sterility is the general rule, or else the creations bear I know not what imprint of the subhuman.

In a word, we must restore the historical consciousness of the African peoples and reconquer a Promethean consciousness.

2. Anthropologically and culturally speaking, the Semitic world was born during protohistoric times from the mixture of white-skinned and black-skinned people in western Asia. This is why an understanding of the Mesopotamian Semitic world, Judaic or Arabic, requires constant reference to the underlying Black reality. If certain Biblical passages, especially in the Old Testament, seem absurd, this is because specialists, puffed up with prejudices, are unable to accept documentary evidence.

3. The triumph of the monogenetic thesis of humanity (Leakey), even at the stage of "Homo sapiens-sapiens," compels one to admit that all races descended from the Black race, according to a filiation process that science will one day explain.*

4. In *L'Afrique Noire précoloniale* (1960), I had two objectives: (1) to demonstrate the possibility of writing a history of Black Africa free of mere chronology of events, as the preface to that volume clearly indicates; (2) to define the laws governing the evolution of African sociopolitical structures, in order to explain the direction that historical evolution has taken in Black Africa; therefore, to try henceforth to dominate and master that historical process by knowledge, rather than simply to submit to it.

These last questions, like those about origins (Egypt), are among

*Cf. Cheikh Anta Diop, "L'Apparition de l'homo-sapiens," *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, XXXII, Series II, number 3, 1970.

—, "La Pigmentation des anciens Egyptiens. Test par la mélanine," *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, 1973 (in press).

the key problems; once they are solved, a scholar can proceed to write the history of Africa. Consequently, it is evident why we are paying particular attention to the solution of such problems and of so many others which transcend the field of history.

The research pattern inaugurated by *L'Afrique Noire précoloniale* on the sociohistorical, not on the ethnographic, plane has since been utilized by many researchers. That, I suppose, is what has led them to describing the daily life of the Congolese or enlarging upon the various forms of political, economic, social, military, and judicial organization in Africa.

5. To define the image of a modern Africa reconciled with its past and preparing for its future.*

6. Once the perspectives accepted until now by official science have been reversed, the history of humanity will become clear and the history of Africa can be written. But any undertaking in this field that adopts compromise as its point of departure as if it were possible to split the difference, or the truth, in half, would run the risk of producing nothing but alienation. Only a loyal, determined struggle to destroy cultural aggression and bring out the truth, whatever it may be, is revolutionary and consonant with real progress; it is the only approach which opens on to the universal. Humanitarian declarations are not called for and add nothing to real progress.

Similarly, it is not a matter of looking for the Negro under a magnifying glass as one scans the past; a great people has nothing to do with petty history, nor with ethnographic reflections sorely in need of renovation. It matters little that some brilliant Black individuals may have existed elsewhere. The essential factor is to retrace the history of the entire nation. The contrary is tantamount to thinking that to be or not to be depends on whether or not one is known in Europe. The effort is corrupted at the base by the presence of the very complex one hopes to eradicate. Why not study the acculturation of the white man in a Black milieu, in ancient Egypt, for example?

7. How does it happen that all modern Black literature has remained minor, in the sense that no Negro African author or artist, to my knowledge, has yet posed the problem of man's fate, the major theme of human letters?

8. In *L'Unité culturelle de l'Afrique Noire*, we tried to pinpoint the features common to Negro African civilization.

*Cf. Cheikh Anta Diop, *Les Fondements culturels et industriels d'un futur Etat fédéral d'Afrique Noire*.

9. In the second part of *Nations nègres*, we demonstrated that African languages could express philosophic and scientific thought (mathematics, physics, and so forth)* and that African culture will not be taken seriously until their utilization in education becomes a reality. The events of the past few years prove that UNESCO has accepted those ideas.†

10. I am delighted to learn that one idea proposed in *L'Afrique Noire précoloniale*—the possibilities of pre-Columbian relations between Africa and America—has been taken up by an American scholar. Professor Harold G. Lawrence, of Oakland University, is in fact demonstrating with an abundance of proof the reality of those relationships which were merely hypothetical in my work. If the sum total of his impressive arguments stands up to the test of chronology, if it can be proved in the final analysis that all the facts noted existed prior to the period of slavery, his research will have surely contributed solid material to the edifice of historical knowledge.

I should like to conclude by urging young American scholars of good will, both Blacks and Whites, to form university teams and to become involved, like Professor Lawrence, in the effort to confirm various ideas that I have advanced, instead of limiting themselves to a negative, sterile skepticism. They would soon be dazzled, it not blinded, by the bright light of their future discoveries. In fact, our conception of African history, as exposed here, has practically triumphed, and those who write on African history now, whether willingly or not, base themselves upon it. But the American contribution to this final phase could be decisive.

Cheikh Anta Diop
July 1973

*In *Nations nègres*, Dr. Diop translates a page of Einstein's Theory of Relativity into Wolof, the principal language of Senegal.

†Bamako 1964 colloquium on the transcription of African languages, various measures taken to promote African languages, and so forth.

CHAPTER I

What Were the Egyptians?

In contemporary descriptions of the ancient Egyptians, this question is never raised. Eyewitnesses of that period formally affirm that the Egyptians were Blacks. On several occasions Herodotus insists on the Negro character of the Egyptians and even uses this for indirect demonstrations. For example, to prove that the flooding of the Nile cannot be caused by melting snow, he cites, among other reasons he deems valid, the following observation: "It is certain that the natives of the country are black with the heat. . . ."¹

To demonstrate that the Greek oracle is of Egyptian origin, Herodotus advances another argument: "Lastly, by calling the dove black, they [the Dodonaeans] indicated that the woman was Egyptian. . . ."² The doves in question symbolize two Egyptian women allegedly kidnapped from Thebes to found the oracles of Dodona and Libya.

To show that the inhabitants of Colchis were of Egyptian origin and had to be considered a part of Sesostri's army who had settled in that region, Herodotus says: "The Egyptians said that they believed the Colchians to be descended from the army of Sesostri. My own conjectures were founded, first, on the fact that they are black-skinned and have woolly hair. . . ."³

Finally, concerning the population of India, Herodotus distinguishes between the Padaeans and other Indians, describing them as follows: "They all also have the same tint of skin, which approaches that of the Ethiopians."⁴

Diodorus of Sicily writes:

The Ethiopians say that the Egyptians are one of their colonies which was brought into Egypt by Osiris. They even allege that this country was originally under water, but that the Nile, dragging much mud as it flowed from Ethiopia, had finally filled it in and made it a part of the continent. . . . They add that from them, as from their authors and ancestors, the Egyptians get most of their laws. It is from them that the Egyptians have learned to honor

kings as gods and bury them with such pomp; sculpture and writing were invented by the Ethiopians. The Ethiopians cite evidence that they are more ancient than the Egyptians, but it is useless to report that here.⁵

If the Egyptians and Ethiopians were not of the same race, Diodorus would have emphasized the impossibility of considering the former as a colony (i.e., a fraction) of the latter and the impossibility of viewing them as forebears of the Egyptians.

In his *Geography*, Strabo mentioned the importance of migrations in history and, believing that this particular migration had proceeded from Egypt to Ethiopia, remarks: "Egyptians settled Ethiopia and Colchis."⁶ Once again, it is a Greek, despite his chauvinism, who informs us that the Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Colchians belong to the same race, thereby confirming what Herodotus had said about the Colchians.⁷

The opinion of all the ancient writers on the Egyptian race is more or less summed up by Gaston Maspero (1846–1916): "By the almost unanimous testimony of ancient historians, they belonged to an African race [read: Negro] which first settled in Ethiopia, on the Middle Nile; following the course of the river, they gradually reached the sea. . . . Moreover, the Bible states that Mesraim, son of Ham, brother of Chus (Kush) the Ethiopian, and of Canaan, came from Mesopotamia to settle with his children on the banks of the Nile."⁸

According to the Bible, Egypt was peopled by the offspring of Ham, ancestor of the Blacks: "The descendants of Ham are Chus, Mesraim, Phut and Canaan. The descendants of Chus are Saba, Hevila, Sabatha, Regma and Sabathacha. . . . Chus was the father of Nemrod; he was the first to be conqueror on the earth. . . . Mesraim became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Laabim, Nephthuhim, Phethrusim, Chasluhim. . . . Canaan became the father of Sid, his first-born, and Heth. . . ."⁹

For the peoples of the Near East, Mesraim still designates Egypt; Canaan, the entire coast of Palestine and Phoenicia; Sennar, which was probably the site from which Nemrod left for Western Asia, still indicates the kingdom of Nubia.

What is the value of these statements? Coming from eyewitnesses, they could hardly be false. Herodotus may be mistaken when he reports the customs of a people, when he reasons more or less cleverly to explain a phenomenon incomprehensible in his day, but one must

grant that he was at least capable of recognizing the skin color of the inhabitants of countries he has visited. Besides, Herodotus was not a credulous historian who recorded everything without checking; he knew how to weigh things. When he relates an opinion that he does not share, he always takes care to note his disagreement. Thus, referring to the mores of the Scythians and Neurians, he writes apropos the latter: "It seems that these people are conjurers; for both the Scythians and the Greeks who dwell in Scythia say that every Neurian once a year becomes a wolf for a few days, at the end of which time he is restored to his proper shape. Not that I believe this, but they constantly affirm it to be true, and are even ready to back up their assertion with an oath."¹⁰

He always distinguishes carefully between what he has seen and what he has been told. After his visit to the Labyrinth, he writes:

There are two different sorts of chambers throughout—half under ground, half above ground, the latter built upon the former; the whole number of these chambers is three thousand, fifteen hundred of each kind. The upper chambers I myself passed through and saw, and what I say concerning them is from my own observation; of the underground chambers I can only speak from report, for the keepers of the building could not be got to show them, since they contained, as they said, the sepulchers of the kings who built the Labyrinth, and also those of the sacred crocodiles. Thus it is from hearsay only that I can speak of the lower chambers. The upper chambers, however, I saw with my own eyes and found them to excel all other human productions.¹¹

Was Herodotus a historian deprived of logic, unable to penetrate complex phenomena? On the contrary, his explanation of the inundations of the Nile reveals a rational mind seeking scientific reasons for natural phenomena:

Perhaps, after censuring all the opinions that have been put forward on this obscure subject, one ought to propose some theory of one's own. I will therefore proceed to explain what I think to be the reason of the Nile's swelling in the summertime. During the winter, the sun is driven out of his usual course by the storms, and removes to the upper parts of Libya. This is the whole secret in the fewest possible words; for it stands to reason that the coun-

try to which the Sun-god approaches the nearest, and which he passes most directly over, will be scantest of water, and that here streams which feed the rivers will shrink the most.

To explain, however, more at length, the case is this. The sun, in his passage across the upper parts of Libya, affects them in the following way. As the air in these regions is constantly clear, and the country warm through the absence of cold winds, the sun in his passage across them acts upon them exactly as he is wont to act elsewhere in summer, when his path is in the middle of heaven—that is, he attracts the water. After attracting it, he again repels it into the upper regions, where the winds lay hold of it, scatter it, and reduce it into a vapor, whence it naturally enough comes to pass that the winds which blow from this quarter—the south and southwest—are of all winds the most rainy. And my own opinion is that the sun does not get rid of all the water which he draws year by year from the Nile, but retains some about him.¹²

These three examples reveal that Herodotus was not a passive reporter of incredible tales and rubbish, “a liar.” On the contrary, he was quite scrupulous, objective, scientific for his time. Why should one seek to discredit such a historian, to make him seem naive? Why “refabricate” history despite his explicit evidence?

NB { Undoubtedly the basic reason for this is that Herodotus, after relating his eyewitness account informing us that the Egyptians were Blacks, then demonstrated, with rare honesty (for a Greek), that Greece borrowed from Egypt all the elements of her civilization, even the cult of the gods, and that Egypt was the cradle of civilization. Moreover, archeological discoveries continually justify Herodotus against his detractors. Thus, Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt writes about recent excavations in Tanis*: “Herodotus had seen the outer buildings of these sepulchers and had described them. [This was the Labyrinth discussed above.] Pierre Montet has just proved once again that ‘The Father of History did not lie.’ ”¹³ It could be objected that, in the fifth century B.C. when Herodotus visited Egypt, its civilization was already more than 10,000 years old and that the race which had created it was not necessarily the Negro race that Herodotus found there.

But the whole history of Egypt, as we shall see, shows that the

*Tanis, the Biblical Zoan, at the mouth of the eastern branch of the Nile Delta.

mixture of the early population with white nomadic elements, conquerors or merchants, became increasingly important as the end of Egyptian history approached. According to Cornelius de Pauw, in the low epoch Egypt was almost saturated with foreign white colonies: Arabs in Coptos, Libyans on the future site of Alexandria, Jews around the city of Hercules (Avaris?), Babylonians (or Persians) below Memphis, "fugitive Trojans" in the area of the great stone quarries east of the Nile, Carians and Ionians over by the Pelusiac branch. Psammetichus (end of seventh century) capped this peaceful invasion by entrusting the defense of Egypt to Greek mercenaries. "An enormous mistake of Pharaoh Psammetichus was to commit the defense of Egypt to foreign troops and to introduce various colonies made up of the dregs of the nations."¹⁴ Under the last Saite dynasty, the Greeks were officially established at Naucratis, the only port where foreigners were authorized to engage in trading.

After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander, under the Ptolemies, crossbreeding between white Greeks and black Egyptians flourished, thanks to a policy of assimilation: "Nowhere was Dionysus more favored, nowhere was he worshiped more adoringly and more elaborately than by the Ptolemies, who recognized his cult as an especially effective means of promoting the assimilation of the conquering Greeks and their fusion with the native Egyptians."¹⁵

These facts prove that if the Egyptian people had originally been white, it might well have remained so. If Herodotus found it still black after so much crossbreeding, it must have been basic black at the start.

Insofar as Biblical evidence is concerned, a few details are in order. To determine the worth of Biblical evidence, we must examine the genesis of the Jewish people. What, then, was the Jewish people? How was it born? How did it create the Bible, in which descendants of Ham, ancestors of Negroes and Egyptians, would thus be accursed; what might be the historical reason for that curse? Those who would become the Jews entered Egypt numbering 70 rough, fearful shepherds, chased from Palestine by famine and attracted by that earthly paradise, the Nile Valley.

Although the Egyptians had a peculiar horror of nomadic life and shepherds, these newcomers were first warmly welcomed, thanks to Joseph. According to the Bible, they settled in the land of Goshen and became shepherds of the Pharaoh's flocks. After the death of Joseph and the Pharaoh "Protector," and facing the proliferation of

the Jews, the Egyptians grew hostile, in circumstances still ill-defined. The condition of the Jews became more and more difficult. If we are to believe the Bible, they were employed on construction work, serving as laborers in building the city of Ramses. The Egyptians took steps to limit the number of births and eliminate male babies, lest the ethnic minority develop into a national danger which, in time of war, might increase enemy ranks.¹⁶

So began the initial persecutions by which the Jewish people was to remain marked throughout its history. Henceforth the Jewish minority, withdrawn within itself, would become Messianic by suffering and humiliation. Such a moral terrain of wretchedness and hope favored the birth and development of religious sentiment. The circumstances were the more favorable because this race of shepherds, without industry or social organization (the only social cell was the patriarchal family), armed with nothing but sticks, could envisage no positive reaction to the technical superiority of the Egyptian people.

It was to meet this crisis that Moses appeared, the first of the Jewish prophets, who, after minutely working out the history of the Jewish people from its origins, presented it in retrospect under a religious perspective. Thus he caused Abraham to say many things that the latter could not possibly have foreseen: for example, the 400 years in Egypt. Moses lived at the time of Tell el Amarna*, when Amenophis IV (Akhnaton, circa 1400) was trying to revive the early monotheism which had by then been discredited by sacerdotal ostentation and the corruptness of the priests. Akhnaton seems to have attempted to bolster political centralism in his recently conquered immense empire through religious centralism; the empire needed a universal religion.

Moses was probably influenced by this reform. From that time on, he championed monotheism among the Jews. Monotheism, with all its abstraction, already existed in Egypt, which had borrowed it from the Meroitic Sudan, the Ethiopia of the Ancients. "Although the Supreme Deity, viewed in the purest of monotheistic visions as the 'only generator in the sky and on earth who was not engendered . . . the only living god in truth . . .' Amon, whose name signifies mystery, adoration, one day finds himself rejected, overtaken by Ra, the Sun, or converted into Osiris or Horus."¹⁷

Given the insecure atmosphere in which the Jewish people found

*Tell el Amarna, a city built 190 miles above Cairo in 1396, as the new capital of Akhnaton's empire.

itself in Egypt, a God promising sure tomorrows was an irreplaceable moral support. After some reticence at the outset, this people which apparently had not known monotheism previously—contrary to the opinion of those who would credit it as the inventor [of monotheism]—would nonetheless carry it to a rather remarkable degree of development. Aided by faith, Moses led the Hebrew people out of Egypt. However, the Israelites quickly tired of this religion and only gradually returned to monotheism. (The Golden Calf of Aaron at the foot of Mount Sinai.)

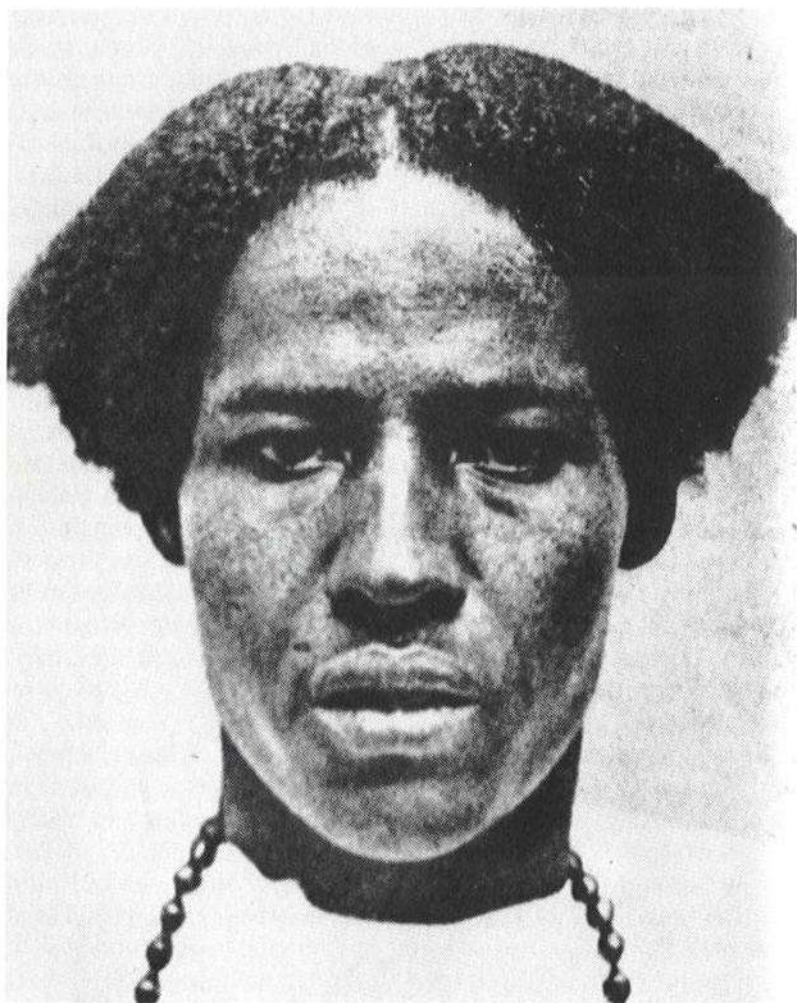
Having entered Egypt as 70 shepherds grouped in 12 patriarchal families, nomads without industry or culture, the Jewish people left there 400 years later, 600,000 strong, after acquiring from it all the elements of its future tradition, including monotheism. 211
N.B.?

If the Egyptians persecuted the Israelites as the Bible says, and if the Egyptians were Negroes, sons of Ham, as the same Bible says, we can no longer ignore the historical causes of the curse upon Ham—despite the legend of Noah's drunkenness. The curse entered Jewish literature considerably later than the period of persecution. Accordingly, Moses, in the Book of Genesis, attributed the following words to the Eternal God, addressed to Abraham in a dream: "Know for certain that your posterity will be strangers in a land not their own; they shall be subjected to slavery and shall be oppressed four hundred years."¹⁸

Here we have reached the historical background of the curse upon Ham. It is not by chance that this curse on the father of Mesraim, Phut, Kush, and Canaan, fell only on Canaan, who dwelt in a land that the Jews have coveted throughout their history.

Whence came this name Ham (Cham, Kam)? Where could Moses have found it? Right in Egypt where Moses was born, grew up, and lived until the Exodus. In fact, we know that the Egyptians called their country *Kemit*, which means "black" in their language. The interpretation according to which *Kemit* designates the black soil of Egypt, rather than the black man and, by extension, the black race of the country of the Blacks, stems from a gratuitous distortion by minds aware of what an exact interpretation of this word would imply. Hence, it is natural to find *Kam* in Hebrew, meaning heat, black, burned.¹⁹ N.B.

That being so, all apparent contradictions disappear and the logic of facts appears in all its nudity. The inhabitants of Egypt, symbolized by their black color, Kemit or Ham of the Bible, would be ac-



2. Handsome East African Hamitic Type (from Nelle Puccioni, "Ricerche antropometriche sui Somali," *Archivio per l'antropologia*, 1911; cited by Seligman in *Egypt and Negro Africa*). Fully to appreciate the joke, replace Seligman's wording above by the "official" interpretation: Handsome type of the paleo-Mediterranean white race to which we owe all black civilizations, including that of Egypt.

cursed in the literature of the people they had oppressed. We can see that this Biblical curse on Ham's offspring had an origin quite different from that generally given it today without the slightest historical foundation. What we cannot understand however, is how it has been possible to make a white race of *Kemit*: Hamite, black, ebony, etc. (even in Egyptian). Obviously, according to the needs of the cause, Ham is cursed, blackened, and made into the ancestor of the Negroes. This is what happens whenever one refers to contemporary social relations.

On the other hand, he is whitened whenever one seeks the origin of civilization, because there he is inhabiting the first civilized country in the world. So, the idea of Eastern and Western Hamites is conceived—nothing more than a convenient invention to deprive Blacks of the moral advantage of Egyptian civilization and of other African civilizations, as we shall see. Figure 2 enables us to perceive the biased nature of these theories.

It is impossible to link the notion of Hamite, as we labor to understand it in official textbooks, with the slightest historical, geographical, linguistic, or ethnic reality. No specialist is able to pinpoint the birthplace of the Hamites (scientifically speaking), the language they spoke, the migratory route they followed, the countries they settled, or the form of civilization they may have left. On the contrary, all the experts agree that this term has no serious content, and yet not one of them fails to use it as a kind of master-key to explain the slightest evidence of civilization in Black Africa.